

Conor Williams, *Washington Post* (blog)

In case you missed it, S. 987 (The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act) failed to pass last night. Despite unanimously passing the Senate, it only garnered a 241-166 majority in the House. Since House rules were in suspension, the bill needed a two-thirds majority to pass.

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), who sponsored the bill, had a blunt response in a late-night press release:

The action on the House floor stopping the Child Marriage bill tonight will endanger the lives of millions of women and girls around the world. These young girls, enslaved in marriage, will be brutalized and many will die when their young bodies are torn apart while giving birth. Those who voted to continue this barbaric practice brought shame to Capitol Hill.

His frustration makes sense: the corresponding House Bill had 112 co-sponsors! What the heck happened?

In the hours before the vote, Republicans circulated a memo to pro-life members of Congress alleging that the bill could fund abortions and use child marriage "to overturn pro-life laws." It also reiterated concerns over the bill's cost. When it came time for a vote, a number of the bill's pro-life supporters in both parties abandoned ship. Even co-sponsors of the corresponding House bill (H.R. 2103), like Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio) and Lee Terry (R-Neb.), voted against it.

Time for the facts. First of all, S. 987 is short--the body of the bill is around ten pages long--and does not mention abortion ("family planning" isn't in there either). A quick read suffices to show that the bill is not dealing with abortion.

Second, as I noted yesterday, it does not appropriate any additional funding. It requires that the President and the State Department make child marriage a core part of American international development strategy. One more time: this means that this bill can't provide funding for abortion. It's not an appropriations bill. Nonetheless, some Republicans appear determined to showcase their conservative credentials at all costs--even when the facts make it unnecessary, even when the world's most vulnerable children bear the bill.

At this point, the bill's future is uncertain, but the ongoing bizarre misrepresentation of a bill designed to empower young girls and women is the worst sort of political gamesmanship. Why play politics with their lives at stake?